



Switching the Script: Unveiling the Linguistic Dance of Code-Switching in Nigerian Online Skits

Olajide Iyanuoluwa⁽¹⁾, Adebayo Olajumoke Oyinlade⁽²⁾*

⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾ Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Nigeria

* jumokeoyinlade18@gmail.com

Abstract

This journal article presents an in-depth investigation into the intricate phenomenon of code-switching in Nigerian online comic skits, a burgeoning genre of digital entertainment. Within Nigeria, a nation characterized by linguistic and cultural diversity, online comic skits have emerged as a potent medium for creative expression, social commentary, and cultural representation. This research delves into the analysis of the different roles and types of code-switching employed by content creators in these skits, elucidating their linguistic, sociocultural, and comedic dimensions. Conducting a descriptive qualitative analysis, Poplack's (1980) Model of Types of Code-Switching and a functional model adapted from Hoffmann (1991) and Appel and Muysken (2005) were applied. Five skits, selected based on substantial viewership and the popularity of content creators, formed the core of this study. Our findings indicate that all three types of code-switching are prevalent in the skits, with inter-sentential switching being the most frequent. Additionally, the seven functions of code-switching manifest in the skits, with the referential function emerging as the most frequent. The primary use of code-switching in these skits revolves around fostering humor, expressing strong emotions, and portraying the educational status of the characters.

Keywords

code-switching, online comic skits, humour, digital entertainment

Introduction

The proliferation of social media sites on the internet has led to the emergence of skits-short video comedy sketches. Recently, Nigeria has seen a surge in the production of comedic skits within the entertainment space (API, 2021). Skits are often short movies that are intended to entertain and make people laugh. Ojomo and Sodeinde (2021) as cited in Simon (2022) state that skits are mainly comic videos that often mirror the unique Nigerian experience that the audience can relate to. In other words, they are used as tools for societal advocacy in combating the many socio-economic and socio-political issues that the country is faced with. The skits often display the daily lives of Nigerians, and families and the many challenges they are faced with. Deliberate deployment of language in comedy skits is one way that skit makers attempt to position themselves as better skit makers than their counterparts in the highly competitive industry.

Code-switching (CS) is a common language phenomenon in bilingual or multilingual communities that is widely studied. People living in bilingual or multilingual communities like Nigeria use language to interact with people of similar speech communities and those who belong to speech communities other than theirs. This results in language contact which manifests in speech through borrowing, language shift, interference, code-switching etc.

The Nigerian skit industry is popular and thriving; it is also highly competitive. Due to its competitive nature, the skit makers try to outdo one another in creating highly humorous content that can engage their audience. Even though most of the skits are predominantly in English and Nigerian Pidgin English, skit makers use their indigenous languages. Most times, these instances are subtitled so that the skits can appeal to many Nigerians irrespective of their ethnic affiliations. Skit makers often employ numerous linguistic and extra-linguistic devices to enact humour in their skits. Based on this assumption, this study investigates the roles and functions of code-switching in Nigerian online comic skits and also finds out the impacts of the use of code-switching in enacting humour in the skits.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the roles and functions of code-switching in Nigeria's online comic skits. The specific objectives are to identify the linguistic patterns and strategies of code-switching employed in Nigeria's online skits; analyse the sociolinguistic motivations behind code-switching in Nigeria's online skits; investigate how code-switching helps to create specific linguistic styles and artistic expressions; and examine how different languages, dialects and linguistic registers are used to convey specific cultural nuances and experiences.

Code-Switching (CS)

CS is a phenomenon or linguistic behaviour commonly used by bilinguals in bilingual communities whereby a speaker uses two or more languages or language varieties in a single interaction or between sentences. Many scholars attempt to distinguish between code-mixing (CM) and code-switching while some scholars treat the two as the same. Some scholars argue that even though CS and CM are both linguistic phenomena that

involve inter-using two or more languages, however, how and when the interchange occurs determines if it is a CS or CM. Baker and Jones (1988) as cited in Aichatou (2020 p. 218) define CS as any switch by interlocutors during conversation, especially at the word, sentence, or discourse level, and CM as the mixing of two or more languages at the word level. Likewise, Fasold (1984) as cited in Aichatou (2020 p. 218) describes CM as the use of a minimum of two languages together in the course of a single utterance. Myers-Scotton (2005, p. 239) defines CS as using two different varieties of language in the same conversation. Instead of differentiating between CS and CM, Myers-Scotton (2005) explains that there are two types of CS: inter-sentential switching and intra-sentential switching. Appel and Muysken (2005) describe intra-sentential switches as CM as they often occur in the middle of a sentence while inter-sentential switches often occur between sentences.

Code-switching in Different Domains of Interactions

Various studies have been carried out on code-switching in different languages and different domains of interaction. Studies like Addendorf (2013) and Sameen, Sameen et al. (2021) have investigated the use of code-switching in academic interactions. The studies show that CS plays an important role in the teacher-learner relationship and that it serves specific learning functions in the classroom.

Other studies focus on the roles and functions of code-switching in music or songs (Zaghlous, 2021; Akande; 2013; and Babalola & Taiwo, 2009). The studies conclude that CS serves the purpose of creating the artiste's unique identity. The code-switching phenomenon has been analysed in different social media platforms or online platforms generally such as *YouTube*, *Instagram*, *Spotify*, etc. (Dewi et al., 2021; Azira et al., 2023; Wentker & Schneider, 2022). The studies show that different types of CS are deployed in these interactions for different functions ranging from identity negotiation, and lexical deficiency to topic factors. Another area of interest in code-switching is advertisements or commercials (Herman et al., 2022; Mehvish, 2019).

Moreover, studies on how Code-switching enhances humour have been studied severally in natural conversations, comedies, and Stand-up comedies. The CS phenomenon is believed to abound in the discourse of humour. Siegel (1995); Al Quran (2022) and Atkinson and Kelly-Holmes (2011) are studies that examine code-switching in different kinds of comedies. The studies establish that there is a strong link between code-switching and humour. Adetuyi, Jegede and Adeniran (2018) explore the use of pidgin in Nigeria stand up comedies and explain that Nigerian Pidgin English is the language Nigerian comedians switch to when they want the comic effect on their expressions to be heightened. Likewise, Lamidi (2017) states that Nigerian comedians often render a large part of their performances in Pidgin due to the multilingual nature of the country. While investigating multimodal code pairing and switching of codes of visual-verbal texts in Nigerian stand-up comedy performances, the study finds that Nigerian comedians use different languages such as Pidgin, English, Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba during their performances.

However, Nigerian online comic skits are different from all the different types of comedy shows that have been studied previously as the online comic skits are usually written in drama form and they often involve more than one character. There is often a setting that matches the story and there could be more than one scene. The Nigerian online comic skits are closer and more similar to movies except that they are more concise and have fewer characters than normal traditional movies.

CS can play a significant role in various forms of media such as movies, TV shows, music, and literature. CS in entertainment can make the content more authentic and more relatable. CS makes people connect more emotionally to entertainment content. It can bring people of different languages and cultures together so that it is more inclusive and appealing to people of diverse audiences. Some studies have been carried out on the occurrence of code-switching in movies (Barnes, 2012; Maros et al. 2016; Pangestu and Sudarwati, 2021; Ningsih and Setiawan, 2021; Hendryani et al. 2021). Furthermore, some studies have also been carried out on code alternation in Nigerian movies and these studies show that filmmakers choose to alternate languages deliberately to achieve certain ideological objectives and for commercial reasons (Iyiola, 2020; Epochi-Orise, 2017).

Despite the popularity of comic skits on the internet space, there are very few studies investigating the use of language in Nigerian online comic skits. Some of the studies on Nigerian online comic skits focus on the impact of the skits during the COVID-19 lockdown period. Odunlami et al. (2020); Amoyeze et. al. (2022) and Inyabri et al. (2021) are studies that show that the popularity of comic skits grew tremendously during the Covid-19 pandemic and they helped people stay informed, hopeful and excited. Adesoye (2018) carries out an analysis of how phonological distortion is used in Folarin Falana's (Falz) comedy skits. However, Adenusi and Onifade (2020) investigate the portrayals of the stereotypical African parenthood in selected Nigerian comic skits.

It is evident that only a little has been done on language alternation in online Nigerian comic skits and this study intends to fill this gap. Nigerian online comic skits have become immensely popular due to their humour, their themes that often reflect the normal day-to-day lives of Nigerians and their linguistic richness; content creators often deploy code-switching as a tool of creativity to enhance their comic effects, authenticate cultural values and to establish specific character or setting.

Poplack (1980) Types of Codeswitching

Poplack (1980) defines three types of CS. Tag switching, inter-sentential switching and intra-sentential switching. Tag Switching is CS that involves inserting tags in sentences that are wholly in another language. Citing Hamers and Blanc (2000 p.59), Stapa and Khan (2016) explain that with this form of CS, a tag in one language is added to an utterance in another language. Examples of tags include interjections, fillers, tags and idiomatic expressions; tags are words that are not structurally integrated into the rest of the utterance (Stapa & Khan, 2016). For instance, Example 1 is from Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*.

Example 1

*Cakes are too soft, Gentlemen. Just you wait! Once we get elected to the top **walahii**, we shall stuff ourselves with huge mouthfuls of the National chin-chin (p.4)*

In Example 1, the speaker uses the term *Wallahi* which is the abbreviation of an Arabic expression “Wa Allah, Ta-Allah” that has become *Wallahi Tallahi* in the Yoruba vernacular. It means God is my witness. Here is a tag that indicates confidence and assurance.

Intra-sentential switching happens at the beginning, middle or end of a sentence. It is a situation where the interlocutors introduce elements of another language within the boundaries of a clause or sentence (Gumperz, 1971; Poplack, 2000). For instance, Dadzie (2004, p. 151) gives the following example:

Example 2

Se o ti ko essay ti won fun wa (Have you written the essay given to us).

In Example 2, there is an introduction of an English word “essay” in the Yoruba expression because it has no equivalent in Yoruba.

Citing Macswan (1999), Stapa and Khan (2016) explain that inter-sentential CS occurs at sentence boundaries. In other words, one clause sentence is one language and the clause that follows is in another. With this type of switches, switches are longer sentence and the speaker has to have a considerable level of proficiency in the two languages. For instance, Dadzie (2004 p.154) gives the following example;

Example 3

Amma banga supervisor din ba. I do not know what to do. (I have not seen my supervisor. I don't know what to do.

Example 3 shows a complete switch from *Hausa* to English in the same discourse.

Functional Model of CS Adapted from Hoffmann (1991) and Appel & Muysken (2005)

Hoffmann (1991) as cited in Al Abdely (2016) delineates ten functions of CS: talking about a particular topic; quotation; emphasis; interjection; repetition; expression of group identity; making clarifications; softening or strengthening arguments; filling a lexical gap and exclusion of others. Appel and Muysken (2005) on the other hand identify six functions: referential, directive, expressive, phatic, metalinguistic and poetic.

Either of the two models may not be sufficient to analyse the function of CS in Nigerian digital comic skits as each model contains certain categories of function that might not be appropriate in analysing the data. However, based on the two models, the researcher has developed a functional model for the analysis of the data. For this study, seven functions of CS will be analysed. They are: referential function, expressive, emphasis, clarification, interjection, poetic and softening or strengthening a request or command.

Expressive function as used in this study corresponds with Appel and Muysken's (2005) directive and Hoffmann's (1991) expression of group identity and exclusion of others. It

directly addressed the hearers; the speakers can use CS to include or exclude someone else present from a portion of the conversation. Parents may for example speak in a foreign language in a setting with their children so that the children will not understand what is being said (Appel & Muysken, 2005 p.132). People use CS to express solidarity with their social groups such as ethnicity, nationality, workplace etc. (Candra & Qodriani, 2018).

Also, the referential function in Appel and Muysken (2005) corresponds with talking about a particular topic and filling a lexical gap in Hoffmann (1991). Armiya and Damiris (2022) explain that CS sometimes occur because sometimes people choose codes that they find easy to use or that they feel others would find easier to understand while discussing a particular topic. In other words, some topics are easier to discuss in one language rather than another (Sumantri, Arifin & Setyowati, 2021). For instance, Example 5 is from Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again*.

Example 5

*Now she will come and mess things up **jagajaga** for me, my party. (p.8)*

Jagajaga is a Nigerian Pidgin word for chaos, disorderliness and confusion, however, it is likely the most appropriate word that the speaker can use to express what he wants to communicate to his hearers. The speaker himself and his hearers are not literate so the term is used to fill a lexical gap.

Hoffmann (1991) as cited in Stapa and Khan (2016 p. 189), people consciously or unconsciously switch to their first language when they want to emphasize some points. Zentella (1997) as cited in Halim and Maros (2014, p. 128) explains that CS is used to emphasize important details of a conversation. For instance;

Example 6

O fine bajebaje

In the example above *bajebaje* is used to intensify how fine the addressee is. It is a Yoruba expression that means "very well". It is used to emphasize what the speaker is saying.

Example 7

"We are all Biafrans! Anyincha Ba Biafra!" (Adichie, 2004 p.389)

In Example 7, the speaker repeats the first statement in Igbo to convey the seriousness of her declarations.

Interlocutors may engage repetition in another code to make clarifications (Armiya & Damiris (2022). If a bilingual wants to clarify or enforce the certainty of a speech, they may introduce another code or variety. Example 7 is from Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Example 8

You must never behave as if your life belongs to a man. Your life belongs to you and you alone, Soso gi (Adichie, 2004, p. 276)

Soso gi means “only you” in English. It is used here to re-enforce the message by repetition or reiteration.

Interjections are also called sentence fillers; they are used to express strong feelings or emotions (Stapa & Khan, 2016). It can be found in the form of short exclamations like *hey* etc. In normal conversations, bilinguals may code-switch to another language to express exclamations such as surprise, sadness, anger etc. (Inuwa, 2014).

Example 9

Now candidates pay N1,000 to JAMB to print the result themselves. *Haba*. There should be some decency and fairness in "revenue generation". (ICE-Nig bl_23.txt as cited in Unuabonah & Daniel, 2020 p. 67).

In Example 9, the person making the statement uses a *Yoruba* interjection to express strong emotions and disappointment.

CS can also be used to add force to a command or request as speakers can switch to reinforce their power over their listeners (Sianipar & Manik, 2018, p.7). It can also be used to express politeness.

Method

Four skits from four different popular Nigerian digital content creators (2 males and 2 females) are selected for this study. The skit makers selected are 4 of the most followed skit makers on YouTube.

Overview of the Selected Skits

Taaooma Court!!! (Skit 1)

Link: <https://youtu.be/cqg9IWWIOew?si=pqNbn7Z9iA08pPNM>

Taaooma Court!!! is written and produced by Maryam Apaokagi. It features the story of a man (played by Maryam Apaokagi herself) who is trying to divorce his wife (still played by Maryam Apaokagi). They both go to court and are represented by overdramatic lawyers- Barrister Mike and Barrister Lasisi. The case ends in disarray and the couple eventually discovers that they do not need a divorce. Maryam Apaokagi popularly known as Taaooma played 5 characters in this skit- Kunle (Tao's father), Ronke (Tao's mother), Tao, Tayo (Tao's brother) and the judge. There is also a court clerk. Most of the characters depicted in the skit seem to be Yoruba-English bilinguals. The video is about 13 minutes long and has over 3.2 million views on YouTube as of 29th August, 2023.

Broda Shaggi My In-Law (Skit 2)

Link: https://youtu.be/8fE0MTLX_bE?si=NAGNV5Fv7CLHQYDq

Broda Shaggi my in-law is written and produced by Mr Macaroni (Adebowale Adedayo) who plays a desperate father who wants to see his daughter married. His daughter, Motunde, comes home with a suitor who initially acts calm, gentle and exposed.

However, he later reveals himself as a lout who is only interested in Motunde for her father's money. The video is about 6 minutes long and as of 29th August, 2023 has about 1.9 million views on YouTube. The three characters portrayed in the skits are Yoruba-English bilinguals.

Teropi Secxion with Uzor Arukwe (Skit 3)

Link: <https://youtu.be/x5TYC3yAcW8?si=neJK0x33h3T-P03->

The 6-minute skit written and produced by Bimbo Ademoye is about a man simply called *Odogwu* who wants to divorce his wife because he feels she is not sexy enough for him. He then visits *Iya Barakat*, a middle-aged semi-literate therapist for therapy. *Iya Barakat* wears bogus make up on her face and her head tie is tied ridiculously to give her a comic outlook. *Odogwu* acts as an Ibo man while *Iya Barakat's* character is Yoruba, however, this corresponds with the actual ethnicity of the cast. The skit was released about a year ago and as of 29th August, 2023 has over 668,000 views on YouTube.

My Husband's Sidechic (Skit 4)

Link: <https://youtu.be/FRjcAOLEYXc>

My Husband's Sidechic was written and produced by Steve Chuks. Steve Chuks plays the role of Madam Gold in this skit. Madam Gold pays an unexpected visit to a lady that her husband has an extra-marital affair with to bully and threaten her. Steve Chuks is Igbo so Madam Gold is an Igbo character. There are three other characters in the skit, the side chic, Madam Gold's bodyguard and a waitress. The skit is about 5 minutes long and as of 28th August, 2023, it has over 706,000 views on YouTube.

Procedure of Data Analysis

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach in the collection and analysis of the data. A qualitative descriptive approach is aimed at investigating an existing phenomenon. This approach is a useful approach for describing data on the CS phenomenon in Nigeria's online comic skits. The researcher analyzes through:

1. Data reduction- where the researcher selects the required data; instances of code-switching in the skits
2. Data analysis- The researcher analyzes the data based on the theory being applied. The researcher transcribes the skits first, then identifies the instances of CS which is then further categorized into the different types and functions of CS.
3. Data presentation- The researcher makes a list of findings followed by a discussion.
4. Conclude- conclusions are drawn from the findings of the code-switching identified in the online Nigerian comic skits.

In the analysis of the data, Poplack's (1980) Type of Code-switching (Intersentential, intra-sentential and tag switching) is used to analyse the different types of CS. However, a model derived by the researchers from Appel & Muysken (2005) and Hoffmann (1991) is used to categorise the instances of CS into different functions.

Results and Discussion

Types of Codeswitching in the Skits

Inter-sentential CS occurs between sentences or clauses (Natalia, 2022, p.37). It occurs when people switch to a first or second language for some other sentences or clauses in speaking occasions. This type of CS is the most popular in the data.

In the data, inter-sentential CS is used by characters portraying older or more advantaged roles to ridicule the ones portraying younger roles. These switches tend to heighten the effect of the ridicule. For instance,

Extract 1 (Skit 4)

Respect? (1.2) <hụ onụ ya> {see her mouth}. Hold that thought! Thank you my darling. I'll have chicken and fries, Thank you.

In the extract above, Madam Gold switches from English to Igbo to ridicule Ada, a lady with Madam Gold's husband has an extra-marital affair. In the skit, characters portraying older females use switches a lot to ridicule and insult people and this makes their characters hilarious as it intensifies their portrayals as bullies.

Characters tend to code-switch to an indigenous language when they want to praise themselves. This makes the dialogue more humorous. For instance,

Extract 2 (Skit 3)

She cannot, dem no born am well(.)E easy to cheat on Odogwu(.)† Abum (I am) watermelon. You understand me †/maka ụmụ nwanyị/ {I am the ladies' favourite} watermelon. AMPLICOS /UMWUANSAN/ {I am the ladies' favourite}

In Extract 2, a male Igbo character tries to convince a semi-literate middle-aged female therapist that he needs to divorce his wife for her failure to dress seductively around the house. The Igbo expressions in the extract are used by the speaker to extol his sexual prowess and enact humour.

Older characters in the skits tend to code-switch to indigenous languages when interacting with younger characters. This may signal the fact that the older ones are supposed to be the custodians of tradition and culture.

Extract 3 (Skit 2)

†</Eyin omode isin yi, e'n bayeje now/>{children of nowadays, you keep doing wrong things} /E N BAYEJE/{you are doing wrong} How will you go out with someone I don't know if he's good for you.

In Extract 3, the character switches to Yoruba while interacting and giving what seems like fatherly advice to his daughter and her suitor. He switches to Yoruba to intensify his scolding of his daughter who had gone on a date with a man that her father is not familiar with. This shows that characters can code-switch to show familiarity with other characters in the skit.

Hence, inter-sentential switches are copiously deployed in the data by characters of varied genders, ages and educational statuses to fit into societal stereotypes and foster humour in the skits.

Intra-sentential switching takes place within a clause or sentence boundary. There were about 67 intra-sentential switching instances found in the data.

Inter-sentential switches are sometimes used by characters to fraternise or show affection to a character to spite another character present in the scene.

Extract 4 (Skit 4)

I know (.) obviously, I'm seated on it(.) Menu please, <biko> {please}

In Extract 4, Madam Gold has just entered the restaurant and sits opposite a young woman who is believed to be having extra-marital affairs with her husband. She switches briefly to Igbo to communicate with the waitress attending to her.

Intra-sentential switches are sometimes used by characters to show and express a state of heightened emotion. For instance,

Extract 5 (Skit 3)

↑Haa!!! Because /**kanipe**/ {If} you're not unfortunate /**ni**/, ↑no be you be dis, you remain for house, you want to kill person child. She should add skimpy to all the one that she's doing for you... because of skimpy you want to divorce, because of skimpy, you're asking for divorce, /**kanipe**/ {If} your wife is here **ni**, /**walahi**/ {Swears}, I for help her find good man, correct man, /**babanla eeyan**/ {good man}.

In Extract 5, Iya Barakat uses intra-sentential code-switching copiously to express herself. These switches make the character sounds semi-literate and this further amplifies humour in the skits. Most of the switches occur in the use of the conjunction *if*. The speaker replaces *if* with its Yoruba equivalent *kanipe* twice in the extract. *Ni* is common among Yoruba-English bilinguals and it is often used in conditional sentences. *Walahi* is a common word in Nigeria though the word is originally Hausa, it is used by people of different ethnicity to swear that what they are saying is the truth.

Intra-sentential switches are often deployed by characters to show that such characters are not low academic qualifications. For instance;

Extract 6 (Skit 3)

/**Amo**/ {but}, **se** {does} she dey give you that/**tibi**/ {that thing}

In Extract 6, there is a move from Yoruba to Pidgin and to English. The character here is portrayed as one with a low proficiency in English hence finds it difficult to get English words for conjunctions and auxiliary verbs. *Tibi* in the extract is a euphemism for sex.

Intra-sentential switching is also used to foster humour in the skits. For instance,

Extract 7 (Skit 2)

/o get mi ni intestine/ {he got me in the intestine}. Oh no, okay, because you're honest...hhh

In Extract 7, Mr Macaroni uses intra-sentential switching. *O get mi ni intestine* is a funny way of saying one is impressed.

Characters who are portrayed as louts and street urchins tend to use intra-sentential CS a lot. For instance;

Extract 8 (Skit 2)

>Sir, /**e wo**/ (see) let's forget all these things I'm wearing it's a lie. /Soro mi yeyin/ {do you understand me?} This cloth, I borrowed it, ah! You see all these English I'm speaking /**ti mo kan so perepere**/ {that I'm just speaking anyhow}.

In Extract 8, Samuel, a cool and softspoken character transitioned into Shaggi, a lout. This transition is also amplified in his dialogues through the use of intra-sentential switches as seen in the extract above. This also shows that intra-sentential CS is often deployed when a character is to be portrayed as angry and impatient.

Tag-switching has to do with the insertion of a tag, idiomatic expression, an exclamation/interjection, or sentence filler (Poplack, 1980). Tag-switches occur 22 times in the selected skits. Tag switches is common among Yoruba/English bilinguals and Igbo/English bilinguals in the skits.

Extract 9 (Skit 4)

Chief Chike Chikeluba! The person you're expecting. 5'11. a strong perfume, strong Igbo accent and a body built like Don Jazzy (.) <**okwaya**> {right?}?

In Extract 11, Madam Gold ends her dialogue with *okwaya* which serves as a tag question to reinforce what she has said. Likewise, in Extract 12, *o ye yin* is a Yoruba expression that means "you understand". Here, it is a tag question used by the speaker to reinforce his expression and elicit feedback. Unlike tag questions used normally in English expressions, these tags are used to enforce dominance or superiority.

Extract 10 (Skit 1)

>She cannot see. I'm the only remedy. /Oye yin/ {Do you understand}.

Extract 11 (Skit 1)

you! So that you can bring in another wife /abi/ {Right}? No problem.

Unuabonah and Oladipupo (2018) explain that *abi* is closely related in meaning to the pragmatic marker *right* and its being used at the end of a sentence changes the sentence from a statement to a question. It is often used to indicate agreement or confirmation as seen in Extract 11.

Functions of Code-Switching in the Selected Skits

The referential function of CS as used in this study involves reasons that relate to the topic being discussed, the need to meet a lexical need or fill a lexical gap, and quotation. It also covers expression of strong emotions for instance anger, surprise, disapproval etc. Code-switches can be used by a speaker to directly quote what the speaker or

another person has said (Halim & Maros, 2014). Sometimes, a change in topic can be another reason for CS and then CS can be used to fill a lexical need or gap.

Referential function accounts for about 46% of the instances of CS in the data and therefore the most frequent CS function in the data.

Extract 12 (Skit 3)

↓E show /**pe**/ you're angry(.).↓ What do her?

Extract 13 (Skit 3)

I didn't mean **pe** (that) she shit? I mean **pe** (that) she shit on you?

The two extracts above were delivered by a character called *Iya Barakat* who runs a therapy clinic. The character is portrayed as a middle-aged woman with low English proficiency. The way she uses English makes her character portrayal more humorous. The extracts above show that the character has problems with English pronouns and conjunctions hence she replaces *but* with its Yoruba equivalent *amo* and that with *pe*.

Extract 14 (Skit 4)

<**Onyeala**> {mad person} you can go, good girl. Ha, the bill. My dear, hold on eh. This wig you're wearing, it was Chike that bought it for you, huh? <**Akwa gi ka nna aju**> {are you not the one I'm talking to?}

In the Extracts above, Madam Gold, a rich middle-aged female character accosts a young lady who is having an extra-marital affair with her husband. She switches to Igbo to express her anger and threat to the young lady. The switch to Igbo makes the character more humorous and the character more convincing. The character is meant to appear rude, pompous and condescending and the switches help to amplify this. She uses *onyeala* to refer to the young lady as a mad person as it seems to sound more as an insult in Igbo than if it was just said in English.

Sometimes, CS is used to perform euphemistic functions. For instance,

Extract 15 (Skit 3)

/**Amo**/ {but}, **se** {does} she dey give you that/**tibi**/ {that thing}

tibi means "that thing" in English which in the extract is used to refer to sex. Using the Yoruba word euphemises the expression and this is important as many of the skit makers wants to create content that is appropriate for all age groups.

CS is also used in the data to express group identity or to indicate the speaker's identity. For instance,

Extract 16 (Skit 3)

Iya Barakat : ↓Sir, do you hear Yoruba
Odogwu : Yes, /**diedie**/ {a little}

In Extract 16, *Iya Barakat* asks her client Odogwu if he understood Yoruba. Odogwu responds to her but switches to Yoruba to identify with her.

Extract 17 (Skit 4)

<negodu nn inasu igbo ofumma>? {you speak Igbo very well} Leave my husband, hian, for what now? Is that what you think this is about? He! I apologize, I tend to give the wrong impression sometimes.

In Extract 17, the addressee is a prim-looking lady who had suddenly started to speak in Igbo to plead after she had been threatened by Madam Gold. Madam Gold responds switching to Igbo to identify with her despite the seeming animosity between them.

Appel & Muysken (2005) explain that the poetic function of CS involves the use of words, puns or jokes in different language to amuse or entertain others. In the selected skits, characters code-switched for poetic function 22 times. For instance,

Extract 18 (Skit 1)

hurry up /o/ this thing /egbon/ {older brother}

In Extract 18, the setting is a courtroom and the court clerk attempts to lead the witness to swear to say the truth but he is too short and was not able to reach the witness. The speaker in the Extract is Barrister Mike and the utterance is made when he has to carry the court clerk. Calling the court clerk *egbon*, a Yoruba word that means older brother is meant to make a joke out of the clerk's height.

A speaker may switch to another language to strengthen a command or soften a request. This function is recorded 36 instances in the data.

Extract 19

Odogwu... which Odo you dey gwu? /**Oya dide**/

In Extract 19, Iya Barakat, the therapist is very angry with her clients. To show that she is very angry and wants him out of her clinic immediately, she switches to Yoruba using the expression *oya dide* which means "now, get up" to order him out of her clinic in strong tones. While saying the expression, she raises her voice and screams to portray the character as very angry at that moment.

Interjections appear 14 times in the skits. Sentence fillers often perform this function as they are used by speakers to express strong feeling or emotions. For instance;

Extract 20

This cloth, I borrowed it, **ah!** You see all these English I'm speaking /ti mo kan so perepere/ {that I'm just speaking anyhow}. One week, I've been cramming it since one week<. ↑**Ha!** /ti mo ra textbook/ {that I bought textbook}, /ta ra dictionary/ {that I bought dictionary}

In Extract 20, the speaker is Samuel who had suddenly transitioned from a cool and softspoken character to a loud miscreant desperate for financial assistance. The interjections *ah*, *Ha* in the extract are common in Nigerian-bilinguals expressions and in this context it is used to amplify the desperation of the speaker. It is also used to portray the character as a loud and miscreant, in other words, it helps the character to fit into the stereotype of thuggery as seen in the country.

Extract 21

...your wife is here ni, /**walahi**/ {Swears}, I for help her find good man, correct man, /*babanla eeyan*/ {good man}. >†**HA!** YOU DEY CRAZE? YOU COME TO ME WASTE MY TIME FOR

In Extract 21, *Iya Barakat* is angry with her client *Odogwu* who wants to divorce his seemingly dutiful wife just because she does not seduce him by wearing skimpy dresses. *Walahi* is a common word in Nigeria but its origin is Arabic and it is believed that anyone who uses it after a statement is definitely saying the truth. However, people also use it to express determination to a particular course of action. In this context, *Iya Barakat* uses it to express her anger towards her client's attitude to his wife.

Bilinguals can use two languages in his repertoire to clarify a message so that they can be understood better.

Extract 22

M : ↓Don't worry, /*maa p'olopa*/ {I will call the police}

S : †>/**Olopa?**/ {Police} /**hehe bi bawo**/ {how}. **You wan call police**

Extract 22 is a dialogue between *Mr Macaroni* and Samuel. Mr Macaroni on finding out that her daughter's potential suitor is a miscreant, he threatens to get him arrested. Samuel repeats the expression *Olopa* to show Mr Macaroni that he is fully prepared for whatever he is bringing on.

Speakers often switch from English to their first language when they want to be emphatic about something. Most times in the data, the emphatic function is geared towards making the character more hilarious. For instance;

Extract 23

I go call boys for Mushin now dem go reach here, /**won ma ba ibi yi je lowo kan**/ {they will scatter this place}

In Extract 23, the speaker is Samuel and the character is being portrayed as a miscreant and a lout. There is a stereotypical portrayal of miscreant and louts in Nigerian literature and movies and the Yoruba expression he switches to helps this character to fit perfectly into that picture so that viewers can relate better with it. Many of the viewers would be able to relate the character to young men they have met in buses or bus parks who act that violently and this will likely foster humour in the skit.

Extract 24

I would've gotten a first class. I know where you stay, I know what you do, **ma kwana** (I also know) that your cycle just started this week.<

In Extract 24, Madam Gold while talking to Ada shows her how much she knows about her. She switches to Igbo to explain to her that she even knows about her cycle. This emphasis is to get Ada very scared and to portray Madam Gold as rich, wise and compelling. The statement gets the desired reaction from Ada who immediately starts to feel endangered and starts to beg for her safety.

This study has shown that the instances of CS used by the characters in the skits are deliberately deployed to foster exaggerated acting, global appeal and humour. This is in line with Nsa and Bassey (2018) that identifies that; African writers use local or native expressions to achieve relevance and authenticity. The use of CS in digital comic skits shows attempts by the creators to reflect the realities of the way English is used in the country. The study identifies three types of CS in the skits; inter-sentential, intra-sentential and tag switching. The most frequently used CS type in the skit is inter-sentential CS.

The data also shows that there is no significant disparity between the ways female characters code-switch and the way male characters code-switch. The findings also reveal that there is no significant difference in CS between Yoruba/English bilinguals or Igbo/English bilinguals. The most significant motivation for CS in the data is the need to convey specific emotions, to portray the literacy level of the character and to foster humour.

The findings also reveal that CS instances in the data perform seven functions: referential, expressive, poetic, emphasis, clarification, strengthening or softening of requests or commands, and interjection. The most frequent function of CS instances in the skit is the referential function. Characters portraying illiterates or semi-literates often CS in the skits to fill a lexical need. This is in line with Ibhawagbele and Edokpayi (2012) who state that CS is often deployed in the speeches of semi-literate characters in Nigerian novels. The referential function also accounts for characters expressing strong emotions of anger, disappointments etc. CS is also used to perform euphemistic functions in the skits. The poetic function of CS is deployed when content creators try to input jokes, puns and character styles in their acts. Some skit-makers and content creators have specific punchlines that they are known for and they often use these to amplify their acts when acting. Other functions of CS in the data are most often deployed to create exaggerated acts and characters and foster humour in the skits. The emphatic function of CS is often used in skits to show characters as proud or determined.

Conclusion

The study sets out to investigate the types and roles of CS in Nigerian online skits using Poplack's (1980) Types of CS and a Functional Model of CS adapted from Hoffmann (1991) and Appel and Muysken (2005). Five skits were selected because of their vast viewership and the large social media followership of the creators. The study set out to identify the linguistic patterns and strategies of CS in Nigerian online comic skits and finds out that inter-sentential, intra-sentential and tag-switching are deployed in the skits to achieve varying levels of humour. The study also attempts to analyse the socio-linguistic motivations behind the use of CS in Nigerian online comic skits and finds out that CS is deployed in the skits to foster humour, appeal to a wider audience and make their acts realistic and authentic. The study also shows that CS instances help to convey different kinds of emotions more strongly and to capture the specific artistic styles of the creators in line with investigating the use of CS to create specific linguistic styles and artistic expressions. The study also shows that Pidgin, Yoruba and Igbo languages are favoured

in the expression of euphemism, anger and other forms of emotion in the online comic skits.

This research has its limitations resulting from the limited time available to the researcher for study. It would have been very beneficial to engage in a comparative study of the roles and functions of Code-switching by Igbo-English bilinguals, Yoruba-English bilinguals and Hausa-English bilinguals. It will be interesting to know whether skits written by members of different ethnic groups vary in the types and functions of CS used in their skits. The findings of the study might also be different if more skits are explored.

Future studies can carry out a large-scale quantitative analysis of code-switching instances in a diverse sample of Nigerian online comedy skits. Code-switching patterns and roles can be investigated across different social media platforms (e.g., *Instagram*, *TikTok*, *YouTube*) to determine if certain platforms encourage specific code-switching practices and if there are platform-specific audience expectations. Subsequent studies can be carried out on how viewers perceive and interpret code-switching in Nigerian online comedy skits through surveys and interviews. Studies can also be carried out on the social impact of these skits in terms of shaping attitudes, promoting inclusivity, or raising awareness of language-related issues.

References

- Adenusi, R. A., & Onifade, O. S. (2020). Exploring the stereotype of the African parent in selected Nigerian comic skits. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 20(6), 47-59.
- Adesoye, R. E. (2018). Phonological distortion as a humorous strategy in Folarin Falana's comedy skits. *The European Journal of Humour Research*, 6(4), 60-74.
- Adetuyi, C. A., Jegede, O. O., & Adeniran, A. A. (2018). Linguistic features of pidgin stand-up comedy in Nigeria. *World Journal of English Language*, 8(2).
- Adichie, C. N. (2004). *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Manigal Technologies Ltd.
- Aichatou, A. N. (2020). Code-Switching/Code Mixing in the National Assembly of Niger. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences (IJELS)*, 5(1).
- Akande, A. (2013). Codeswitching in Nigerian hip-hop lyrics. *Language Matters*, 44 (1) pp. 39-57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10228915.2012.744083>
- Al Abdely, A. A. W. (2016). Power and solidarity in social interactions: a review of selected studies. *Language & Communication*, 3(1), 33-44.
- Amoyeze, C., Okeke, A., & Agbo, O. (2022). Evaluation of Covid-19 themed comedy Skits in social media health reportage in Southern Nigeria. *Webology*, 19(4).
- Anindita, K. (2023). An analysis of code-switching in the movie "LUCA". *ELTR Journal*, 7(1), 23-33.
- API (2021). *Skit economy: An assessment of digital content creators in Nigeria*. Africa Polling Institute
- Ardila, I. (2022, February). The Use of Code Switching in Responding to "Viral" Status on Instagram. In *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Democracy and Social Transformation, ICON-DEMOST 2021*, September 15, 2021, Semarang, Indonesia.

- Armiya, H., & Damiris, C. (2022). Code Switching and Code Mixing in Youtube's "Bule KW" Channel. *Metaphor*, 5(1), 1-15.
- Atkinson, D., & Kelly-Holmes, H. (2011). Codeswitching, identity and ownership in Irish radio comedy. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43(1), 251-260.
- Auer, P. (2000). Why should we and how can we determine the "base language" of a bilingual conversation? *Estudios de Sociolingüística*, 1(1), 129-144
- Azira, N., Purwanti, I. T., & Eliwarti, E. (2023). An analysis of code-switching in Daniel Mananta network Youtube channel. *Jurnal PAJAR (Pendidikan dan Pengajaran)*, 7(2), 299-313.
- Babalola, E.T.O & Taiwo, R. (2009). Code-switching in contemporary Nigerian hip-hop music. *Itupale Online Journal of African Studies*, 1
- Barnes, L. (2012). The role of code-switching in the creation of an outsider identity in the bilingual film. *Communication*, 38 (3) pp. 247-260.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02500167.2012.716764>
- Brann, C. M. B. (1990). The role and function of languages in government: Language policy issues in Nigeria. *Sociolinguistics*, 19(1-2), 1-19.
- Candra, L.K. & Qodriani, L.U. (2018). An analysis of code-switching in Leila S. Chudori's For Nadia. *TEKNOSASTIK*. 16 (1) pp. 9-14
- Dadzie, A.B.K. (2004). Bilingualism. In Dadzie, A.B.K & Awonusi, S. (eds) *Nigerian English; Influences and Characteristics*. Sam Iroanusi Publications.
- Dewi, G. F. N., Suastini, N. W. & Jayantini, G. A. (2021). Types and functions of code switching found in Deddy Corbuzier's podcast on Spotify. *ELYSIAN Journal*. 1(1) pp. 51-60
- Eben, A. A. (2019). The Satirical Social-Media Skits As Template For New Education: Understanding The Amateurish Auteurism In Nation Building. *Ethiopian e-Journal for Research and Innovation Foresight (Ee-JRIF)*, 11(2).
- Epochi-Olise, R. E. (2017). Politics of Language in Kunle Afolayan's The Figurine (Araromire). *EJOTMAS: Ekpoma Journal of Theatre and Media Arts*, 6(1-2).
- Gal, S. (1989). Language and political economy. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 18, pp. 345-367
- Gumperz, J. J. (1971). *Language in social groups*. Stanford University Press.
- Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge University Press.
- Halim, N. S., & Maros, M. (2014). The functions of code-switching in Facebook interactions. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 118, 126-133.
- Herman, H., Van Thao, N., Purba, R., & Simanjuntak, N. S. U. (2022). Attracting viewers through advertisement by using code mixing: A sociolinguistics study. *Anglophile Journal*, 2(2), 80-88.
- Hoffmann, C. (1991). *An introduction to bilingualism*. Longman Inc.
- Hoffmann, C. (2014). *An introduction to bilingualism*. Routledge.
- Ibhawaegbele, F. O., & Edokpayi, J. N. (2012). Codeswitching and code-mixing as stylistic devices in Nigerian prose fiction: A study of three Nigerian novels. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 6(2), 12-18.
- Inuwa, Y. N. (2014). Functions of Hausa-English code switching: A sociolinguistic investigation (Doctoral dissertation, MA Thesis (Universiti Utara Malaysia))

- Inyabri, I., Aboh, R., & Mensah, E. (2021). Laughing at the pandemic: youth performance and digital humour in response to Covid-19 in Nigeria. *English Academy Review*, 38(2), 105-116.
- Iyiola, A. D. (2021). Code-switching, code-mixing and code-conflicting in Abeni by Tunde Kelani. *KIU Journal of Humanities*, 5(4), 169-174.
- Lamidi, M. T. (2017). Multimodal code-pairing and switching of visual-verbal texts in selected Nigerian stand-up comedy performances. *Legon Journal of the Humanities*, 28(2), 105-129.
- Maros, M., Noorizan, N. D. M. M., & Zakaria, A. H. I. (2016). Code switching as the medium of solidarity in 'Ola Bola'. *Jurnal Komunikasi*, 32(2), 1-28.
- Mehvish, R. İ. A. Z. (2019). Language variation: Code-mixing and code-switching in Pakistani commercials. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 15(2), 411-419.
- Myers-Scotton, C. (2005). *Multiple Voices: An Introduction to Bilingualism*. Blackwell Publishers.
- Natalia, P. R. (2022). An Analysis of Code-Switching in "Ali & Ratu Ratu Queens" Movie. *Linguistics Initiative*, 2(1), 33-47.
- Ndifon, V. O., Okon, C., & Idoko, O. R. (2022). The promotion of societal values in Nigerian comedy videos: study of Mark Angel Comedy Skits. *Journal of Media, Communication and Languages*.
- Ningsih, O. S., & Setiawan, T. (2021). Code Mixing and Code Switching in the "Yowis Ben" Movie: Sociolinguistic Study. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, 4(4), 14-19.
- Nsa, A.O. & Bassey, E. (2018). Code-switching and code-mixing in Chimamanda's Half of a Yellow Sun. *Ndunode*, 13(2) pp. 363-370
- Odunlami, D., Adebayo, J. J., & Atewolara-Odule, O. (2020). Humour as a crisis communication strategy: content analysis of selected Covid-19 Facebook cartoons, images and skits in Nigeria. *African Journal of Science and Nature*, 11, 322-332.
- Okhuosi, R. E. (2022). An exploration of phonological jokes in Maryam Apaokagi's selected comedy skits. *The European Journal of Humour Research*, 10(4), 38-56.
- Pangestu, R. C. M., & Sudarwati, E. (2021). If not us, who?: Preserving Javanese language through code switching practice in Yowis Ben movie. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics*, 6(3), 593-605.
- Pontianus, V. J., & Oruonye, E. D. (2021). The Nigerian population: A treasure for national development or an unsurmountable national challenge. *International Journal of Science and Research Archive*, 2(1), 136-142.
- Rotimi, O. (1977). *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. University Press
- Sameen, S., Farid, A. & Hussain, M.S. (2021). A critical discourse analysis of impact of code-switching on modern adult language learners' motivation in Pakistan. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*. 17 (special issue), pp. 109-121
- Sianipar, H. M., & Manik, S. (2018). Code Mixing and Code Switching as Found in Situation of Politeness in Banking Services. *Episteme*, 4(2), 1.
- Siegel, J. (1995). How to get a laugh in Fijian: Code-switching and humour. *Language in Society*, 24, 95-110. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S004740450001842X>
- Stapa, S. H., & Khan, N. N. B. S. (2016). Functions of code-switching: A case study of a mixed Malay-Chinese family in the home domain. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 24(3), 181-194.

- Sumantri, W.H., Arifin, B.M. & Setyowati, R. (2021). The analysis of code switching in Eleanor Young's Crazy Rich Asians film. *Jurnal Bahasa*, 5(3) pp. 518-526
- Unuabonah, F. O., & Oladipupo, R. O. (2018). "You're not staying in Island sha o": O, sha and abi as pragmatic markers in Nigerian English. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 135, 8-23. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2018.07.007>
- Unuabonah, F. O., & Daniel, F. O. (2020). Haba! Bilingual interjections in Nigerian English: A corpus-based study. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 163, 66-77.
- Villadarez, C. (2021). Analysis on Code-switching in Pinoy Songs. *International Journal of Literature and Translation*, 4(10), 148-158. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2021.4.10.18>
- Wardaugh, R. (1986). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Blackwell.
- Wentker, M., & Schneider, C. (2022). And she be like 'Tenemos Frijoles en la Casa': Code-switching and identity construction on YouTube. *Languages*, 7(3), 219.
- Zaghlous, S.M. (2021). Codeswitching and Identity construction in 'Takh's [Boom/Bang] Call me Ziko